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**OBEY USES APPROPRIATIONS
TO CHANGE THE COUNTRY'S PRIORITIES**

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*Discusses Education, Healthcare, Iraq, And Other Priorities
At Meetings Around The 7th District*

Wausau, WI -- At meetings throughout the 7th Congressional District, Congressman Dave Obey (D-WI), the new Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, described the new funding priorities in this year's domestic budget, which Obey and his Senate counterpart, Chairman Robert C. Byrd (D-WV), wrote and pushed through Congress after the Republican leadership failed to complete their work last year.

â€œBecause of a disagreement between House and Senate Republicans, the Congress failed

to complete any portion of the domestic budget last year. When we took over this year, we had to rewrite those bills and make the hard choices so that we could move forward," Obey said, noting that he knew they had made the right budget choices when 67 Republican Congressmen ignored their leadership and voted with Democrats "on this change of direction on budget priorities."

The budget package passed both the House and the Senate with strong bipartisan support and was signed into law by the President last week.

Obey told the groups that the top priorities in the new Obey/Byrd budget are:

1. Veterans' health care "which is why the budget includes a \$3.6 billion increase for the Veterans' Administration to provide service for an anticipated increase of at least 325,000 patients and to meet rising health care costs.

2. Access to higher education "which is why the budget provides a \$260 increase in the maximum Pell Grant, to \$4,310, to help more than 5.3 million college students pay rising college expenses.

3. Access to healthcare "which is why the budget provides over \$200 million more to allow Community Health Centers to serve 1.2 million new patients.

4. Health research “ which is why the budget increased funding for the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and global HIV/AIDS initiatives.

On the war, Obey expressed pleasure that after the U.S. Senate’s effort to object to the President’s plan to intensify our effort in Iraq by increasing the number of troops on the ground stalled, the House of Representatives went on record with its objection. “That is just the first step,” Obey said. “After this we will try to take steps to limit the President’s ability to proceed with his build-up by requiring that certain readiness standards must be met before units can be deployed.”

Obey added that, as Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, he has been “insisting that any proposal limiting the President’s build-up also includes a provision to prohibit the President from instituting military action against Iran unless Congress authorizes it.”

“On Iraq, our troops won the war, God bless them,” Obey said, “but the problem with the President's plan is that it calls upon our troops to do something they do not have the power to do, and that is to convince the Iraqi factions to stop killing each other and work together on a political compromise. Instead of the President's surge, in my view, we should set a rough target for repositioning our troops out of the area. We should recognize that Sunni, Shiites and Kurds will never join together in a strong central government. We should tell the Iraqis that if they do not amend their constitution to allow for a loose confederation - with an oil-sharing agreement between the Sunnis and the Shiites - then we will leave them to each other’s tender mercies.

We should participate in regional discussions with all parties including Syria and Iran. And we should resume aggressive leadership to resurrect a meaningful Middle East peace process.â€

Obey concluded by noting that â€œwe took these action on the budget and on Iraq to send a signal that Congress is moving in a new direction and is being run by people with a different set of priorities â€“ putting the needs of average working people ahead of the economic and political elites and trying to extricate ourselves for the worst foreign policy disaster of our lifetimes.â€

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